



OFFICIAL NEWS RELEASE

MISSISSIPPI FORESTRY COMMISSION
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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March is Wildfire Prevention Month

The Mississippi Forestry Commission announces, by proclamation signed by Governor Barbour, that March is wildfire prevention month in Mississippi. A copy of the proclamation is posted on the forestry commission's Web site.

"Historically, more wildfires occur in March than any other month in Mississippi," said Charlie Morgan, state forester of the Mississippi Forestry Commission. "This is due to the combination of dry leaves, grass and other vegetation; strong, gusty winds; and the increased level of outdoor activity as many property owners begin clean-up projects on their farms and woodlands."

During the month of March, the forestry commission is conducting a wildfire prevention campaign designed to raise the public's awareness to the threat of wildfire and to prevent wildfires caused by carelessness. Carelessness with debris burning is a leading cause of wildfire in Mississippi. Officials with the commission point out that wildfires burn more than trees. Houses, out buildings, farm and outdoor recreational equipment, vehicles, and even lives are sometimes lost.

On average 25 percent of the wildfires and 42 percent of the acres burned occur in the month of March. The average size of a March wildfire is 26 acres. (For reference, one acre is about the size of a football field.) The average annual wildfire activity in Mississippi is 3,256 wildfires that burn 55,820 acres.

The Mississippi Forestry Commission urges the public, especially rural property owners, to not burn outdoor debris on windy days. Check with local officials for burn ban information. The commission lists counties with active bans against open outdoor burning on its Web site at www.mfc.ms.gov.

The forestry commission encourages residents to protect their home from the destructive forces of wildfire. Homeowners can become "firewise" by following these fire safety tips:

- Clear flammable vegetation up to 30 feet away from your house.
- Eliminate "ladder" fuels by mowing tall grass, trimming shrubs, and pruning lower tree branches. Ladder fuels allow a ground fire to climb up.
- Keep the lawn watered and mowed short (3 inches or less) on all sides of all buildings.
- Clean the roof, gutters, and windowsills of leaves, needles, and other debris.

For more information on wildfire safety tips, visit www.mfc.ms.gov.

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